



Review of Cultural Authority and Political Culture in China: Exploring Issues with the Zhongyong and the Daotong during the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties

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Christian Soffel and Hoyt Cleveland Tillman. Cultural authority and political culture in China : exploring issues with the Zhongyong and the Daotong during the Song, Jin and Yuan dynasties. Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012. 223 pp.

This book combines two rather discrete studies. Christian Soffel's three chapters concern the Zhongyong in the Song; Hoyt Tillman's three discuss the intellectual career of Hao Jing 郝經 (1223-1275).

Christian Soffel introduces some Song views of the authorship of the Zhongyong 中庸 to make the point that not all shared Zhu Xi's certainty about Zisi's authorship and implication that the work thus conveyed Confucius's ideas. Second, he takes up views of the concept of Daotong 道統 in Southern Song. The two, the Zhongyong and Daotong, go together because Zhu Xi establishes the idea that there was a true transmission of the Way in the first lines of his preface to the Zhongyong. Depending on one's perspective, that preface is important because it is the most influential statement of Daotong as the name for the idea that there is one true line of Confucian thought or because it sets out the all-important Zhu Xi claim that human consciousness is fundamentally dualistic, drawing on bodily consciousness and an innate moral consciousness. I raise this because it gets at a methodological question for intellectual historians. The introduction states that "one goal of the present study is to understand the role of the Zhongyong during the Song dynasty...and then to use these results to gain additional perspective on the issue of cultural authority and the formation of "Confucian traditions" (p. 21). This more sociological way of looking at intellectual traditions is concerned with the dynamics of claiming authority. It reminds us that righteousness and wisdom alone do not guarantee that others will pay attention and asks that we look at how it came about that one person, Zhu Xi in this instance, was successful in establishing as leading figure in what once was a broader and more amorphous movement. This is an issue that has been of particular concern to Hoyt Tillman over the years in writing about what he has called the "Daoxue fellowship;" Soffel generally adopts that view. The other approach, most evident in Tu Weiming's Centrality and commonality : an essay on Chung-yung (Hawaii, 1976) focuses on the ideas in the text and interprets the text in the search of meaning. Zhu's famous preface is interesting because, on one hand, it constructs a Confucian tradition, an intellectual lineage, and makes a claim to exclusive authority and, on the other hand, makes the core Neo-Confucian claim that the mind, independently of culture and tradition, is endowed with the ability to access innate moral knowledge. Zhu's "Preface to the Zhongyong jijie 中庸集解," translated here (p. 53) is all about lineage, but the final work, the "Preface to the Zhongyong zhangju 中庸章句" is about both lineage and ideas. It seems to me that the question of how authority is established needs to go together with the question of what ideas that authority is being used to promote.

Critics of the history of ideas have pointed out that reading texts without attention to linguistic and historical context often goes together with the assumption that texts are coherent and contain doctrines. This was, as evidential scholars would later demonstrate, a key failing of Neo-Confucian hermeneutics. Soffel is alert to linguistic context – for example his study of Zhu's citation of the Chengs (p. 58). There are issues of historical context that might well have been adduced. For example, Ye Shi's skepticism

about the Zhongyong, treated here as a problem with “the language, and not so much the philosophy behind it” (p.71). Can we say this without knowing what was the philosophy Ye discerned in the text, if we grant that what a text means depends on the reader (something not all would grant; see Andrew Plaks, Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung: the highest order of cultivation and on the practice of the mean [Penguin Books, 2003])? Ye’s point is that the Five Classics, specifically the Book of Documents is adequate, there is no need to elevate the Zhongyong (p. 70). I suspect that the issue to be pursued here is Ye’s unease with giving the Four Books priority over the Five Classics, something a number of literati at the time expressed, and implicitly making the Four Books and their focus on self-cultivation more important than the state-centric perspective of the Classics. Similarly, Wang Bo attitudes toward the Zhongyong and Zhu Xi can be usefully placed in the context of the effort by the lineage of Jinhua Neo-Confucians (He Ji, Wang Bo, Jin Luxiang, and Xu Qian). These so-called “Jinhua Masters,” literati who acknowledged Zhu Xi’s place in the Daotong and sought to present themselves as his successors (in competition with others in Jinhua and elsewhere who made similar claims) faced a particular problem: what were they supposed to do other than practice what Zhu had taught? Was Daoxue a continuously evolving tradition that they could participate in as teachers and writers? Wang offered a kind of solution that made a place for him and his 13th century predecessors and successors in Jinhua.¹

Hoyt Tillman’s three chapters on Hao Jing are particularly welcome. Hao was born under the Jin, lived under Mongol rule and served at Khubilai’s court, and was sent south to persuade the Song but was held in Zhenzhou for sixteen years until his death in 1275 and the conquest of the south began. Hao has received less attention in Western language scholarship than he deserves, given the existence of a rich body of writings, particularly for someone who lives through transitions that required shifting loyalties and reflection on serving foreign conquerors.

¹ There is an extensive literature on Jinhua Neo-Confucianism, see Bol, “Neo-Confucianism and Local Society, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century: A Case Study,” in The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History, ed. Richard von Glahn and Paul Smith (Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), pp. 241-83.